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Quarters

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Adagio

• Michael Koch

At the head of the dark, steep flight of stairs there was a ballet studio. In the front, a gray waiting room rambled over white wicker furniture to a bay window and a sign—Ema Kelly School of Ballet. Tense figures were suspended in the sharp colors of posters on the walls. A door in the corner of the room opened a pattern of small and large rooms, dressing rooms and studios.

Behind a crowded desk at this door, Ema Kelly's mother sat. Mrs. Maureen Kelly exhausted time by collecting money from the students, tracing all of her transactions on white index cards, which she took from a lopsided bunch held with a rubber band. Her dog, a beagle named Bagel, was always leashed to the leg of the desk.

When Carson came in, a tiny, young girl was petting Bagel, and talking to Mrs. Kelly.

"My mother said to tell you that that check was for the two weeks before last week, and when my mother comes here tomorrow, she will pay you for last week and this week; and then next week, I'll pay you for next week."

Years of galloping explanations had mellowed Mrs. Kelly. She no longer tried to correct students, but made a notation on the girl's card and said with wandering assurance: "Yes, dear. Now go get dressed; your father will be here soon."

The girl squeezed the fingers of her right hand together and scratched

Bagel softly on the head. "Okay. Good-bye, Bagel." She put her finger on the dog's nose and ran giggling to the dressing rooms.

"Hi, Mrs. Kelly." Carson scratched the dog's ears. "How are you, Bagel?"

Mrs. Kelly was pulling at her index cards. "Hello, Thomas. Diana should be done in a few minutes."

Carson went to the bay window to watch the sun set on Bowler Street. The sexton of the Episcopal Church across the street was clearing the dregs of September from the sidewalk. He pushed the leaves and dry branches into the gutter and poked them into a pile.

Two colored boys were throwing a football in the church parking lot. A bus passed, each window reflecting the sunset in a snap as it crossed a break in the shadows of buildings. Businessmen buttoned suitcoats as they moved briskly towards Horn and Hardart's restaurant on the corner.

Two girls came out from the dressing rooms. Carson heard someone clapping the beat over flowing piano music, and he stretched, feeling content and comfortable as an observer among so much action.

The room began to fill with parents and students. There were giggles from a group around the dog and a drone of conversation among a circle of parents in the middle of the room.

Carson withdrew further into the bay. He was leaning against the win-

dowsill and could feel a cold bit of air through the top, where the caulking had fallen out.

The sexton and the colored boys were standing in the healthy glow of the burning leaves. All were blank-eyed looking deep into the flames.

"Hi." Diana was there. She buried her face into his shoulder—part of an awkward hug. "I didn't see you. I thought you weren't here yet."

Her back was wet through the porous nylon leotard. "As usual, I've been waiting for hours. Look across the street; they're burning leaves already."

"Yes . . ." She followed his glance, saw, and quickly turned back to kiss him in the corner of his mouth.

He smiled. "You're soaking wet, you know."

"Yes." She pulled away from his arm and walked across the bay. She was tall, and her proportions were hard and elegantly muscular through the leotards. "Do you notice anything different?" She walked with her toes out—a result of her training, which made her step firm.

"Uh . . . you've got new ballet shoes." It was a classical scene, and he knew he would be wrong.

"No, silly. I've lost an eighth of an inch off my waist."

"Oh," he said, "I should have noticed that."

"Silly." She skipped across and took his hand into her hands. "Where shall we go tonight? Harold's?"

"No. I don't think he's home. But we could eat at Montique's, then go to a movie or something."

"Okay. Don't go away." She kissed his hand and was off through the room.

Across, the colored boys were gone. The sexton pushed the leaves on the outside into the center of the

fire. Again the flames were up, making it a warm, red spot in the gathered dark.

A little girl stood with her mother at the desk. "What's the doggie's name, Mrs. Kelly?"

Mrs. Kelly, for once without her index cards, beamed with confidence. "Why, his name is Bagel."

The little girl stared at Bagel. She did not believe this for a moment. "But he is already a bagel."

Mrs. Kelly fumbled. She had not been confronted with such confusion since the last time she touched an index card. "No No No . . . Bagel is his name; beagle is his *nationality*."

The fire across was down again. Carson could see only the legs of the sexton in the glow. He moved out of the bay, put on his coat, and was waiting among talk of Bagel's nationality when Diana came out.

"Montique's?" She took his arm.

"Yes," Carson said, "Montique's."

Fair Avenue, dense with movement and noise, descended in a smear of light to the commercial district. Walking down to Montique's, Carson could see where the haze of light from the district fused with the dark above. He remembered first seeing Washington; it was on a train going South in early winter. Just before midnight his father had pointed to a mound of light on the horizon. In a while the mound spread around them, and he could see straight classical buildings raised on high ground and singled out in stark light. This thought impressed him now, and he idled over the contributions from his apartment to the glow above the city.

"Tommy." Diana was pulling him towards a store window.

"Hey! Easy on the arm." She eased and came back to his side.

"Look at the boots. Wouldn't I look arty in a pair of those?"

"Yeah. As a matter of fact, you'd look so arty I'd have to walk three steps in back of you to protect my image."

"Image?"

"That of a fine Christian gentleman . . ." He started walking. "And a promising young American writer." "Oh . . . then I better not buy them."

Montique's was an Italian restaurant in the middle of a colonial redevelopment section of the business district. It was a long and ample place of pale blues and greens dominated by a ubiquitous headwaiter. Diana called him Monti.

Carson liked Monti because he refrained from the obvious. The possibilities of two lovers and a headwaiter were always explored late at night in bad movies or in the mediocre literature which Carson swore he would never write.

Monti's only condescension to the romantic was a table by a window removed from the main dining section.

Monti nodded a greeting, set them at *this* table, put menus in front of them, and withdrew.

When he had gone: "I think Monti is warming to us, Tom. Did you see the big smile he gave us?"

"Yeah. But you better not let him hear you call him Monti, or we'll be seated out in the kitchen next time."

"I don't know what else to call him. He never says five words at one time."

"I like him for that."

"Yes." She was wandering among the dinners and entrées.

"Do you want a drink?"

"No . . . I'm on a diet, remember?"

"Oh. I think I'll skip the drink too."

The waitress came and they ordered.

"Tommy, do you think . . . ?" She was tracing squares in the thick tablecloth.

"Occasionally."

"Please be serious, Tommy." She smiled—a brief thin strain on her mouth. "Do you think they'll pay you a lot for the book?"

"They haven't bought it yet."

"Well, when they do buy it."

"You mean *if* they buy it."

"Yes." The brief strain again. "If they buy it."

He was sorry for such blunt insistence and reached for the tracing hand. "I don't know, Diana. There's a good chance they may pay me a few thousand."

"That would be a good start, wouldn't it?" Her eyes blinked up from the tablecloth and turned obtusely to the room.

"Yes, and if the book sold well, they might give me a contract or publish a collection of short stories."

There was silence for a time. The waitress spread the table. The bar massed with theater crowds. Diana ate with too much attention.

Carson was watching the street corner, and he saw it as a glow (he remembered the sexton's fire) in the dining room reflections. A blue and red neon haze spread into the street light and produced a colored mist to silhouette walkers. A boy ran across the light and jumped the curb.

Carson remembered sitting in the audience on a spring night. He could smell the damp air carried across between open fire-doors. Diana was twisting out of the arms of a strong blue man. The man was entirely blue. His thick arms were deep blue

in the concave strainings of the muscles, and light, almost silver, along the bulging tops. She took a step and his huge hand closed on her brown wrist. The length of his arm oscillated in curls like a whip, and then snapped Diana into spins. She turned across the stage covering the full length, with her pink clothing ballooning around her. At the blue portals, she disappeared in a long, wide leap.

When Carson went backstage, she was leaning against the bracing of scenery. Among the people surrounding her was the blue man. He was surprised to see that the blue man was not muscular. Solid, yes, but the muscles were a trick of lighting. She saw him and broke through the circle around her.

Her hair was pulled tight to her skull and tied back in a knot. He could see lines of rolling sweat in the brown make-up on her face. She did not hug him because of the make-up, but took his hand. He remembered he had been glad that she chose him over the blue man. He had known then that they would someday have the talk Diana was now working up to.

It came over coffee.

"Tom, will we get married if you sell your book?"

He had not expected it to be this sudden. He felt his thoughts curling and twisting under, like the smoke from his cigarette. "Well, ah . . ."

"Because if you're not going to marry me, I wish you'd tell me."

He had caught the curl of his thoughts and began to straighten them out. "I don't know whether I could . . . I mean I don't know if I could marry you. It's not because I don't want to—because I do want to. It's just that . . . you would have to spend so much time with the bal-

let and you would be away so much." He wanted to say more, to explain it logically to her, to show her a truth. The ballet and his writing were not compatible. But his thoughts had turned under and away from him again.

"I'd give it up." She said it flatly and with the same suddenness that had opened the conversation.

"But you may not be happy giving it up."

"I could try . . . we could try . . ." She slipped into a murmur. The waitress had come with more coffee.

He waited for the waitress to leave. He noticed the smoke rose straight now from the underglow of the gray-end cigarette. "And if you found out you couldn't give up dancing, what would you do? Pine over the reviews in the morning paper? Run away?" He saw that she was finished. He had said enough.

She got up. He visioned her running in tears to the door. She would draw the stares of the whole dining room, and as she disappeared, the stares would snap to him. Monti would then come to comfort him; he would move to the bar to get stoically drunk amid romantic music. But she left her purse on the table and, excusing herself, walked across to the flight of stairs to the powder room.

He looked to the haze of light. Shadows moved in it. Shadows against a purple mist, like the opening of a ballet. How would it be? Oh, yes. It would be just before dawn. The shadows are darting, looking for places to hide. They would wait until the sun got high enough to demand their presence, and then they would appear, attached to figures. A figure would move alone and easy in the early morning. It would be languid,

stretching in slow movement across the stage until suddenly a large orange sun appeared, and with it a mimicking shadow. The figure would explore the shadow first and, then becoming frightened, try to break free from the black leech. And so it would appear on stage as a frenzy of bright figures twining and sliding, mimicked in black. Carson was distracted by movement in the reflections of the window—Diana was back.

She sat down with a swift ease and immediately began putting things in order—her purse, her coffee cup, and them. "I really don't know what I was thinking of—" Here she moved her purse into her lap. "After all, I've only known you six months . . ." Two-handed, she arranged her coffee in front of her. "I certainly shouldn't rush things." She smiled, a thing which always charmed Carson because her chin was set higher than a non-dancer's.

She had refused a cab, so they were cold when they reached her street. Twice during the long walk she teased him into running, and they ran in the gutter, kicking through the leaves or on the pavement, parting hands when they passed somebody and joining further on. The last run had ended when he tripped in a rough joint of the gutter and fell into a large brown pack of leaves. Diana had sat on the curb in undignified laughter. He remitted with a burst of leaves.

Her street was narrow and cobblestoned. There were small brick colonial houses behind the low pavements and old street lamps.

They stopped at the top of the street. It was without cars because of its size. The spaces between street lamps were halved by lamps on the

opposite side of the street. They could follow with their eyes spots of yellow thick leaves under each lamp, back and forth down the length of the street.

Diana squeezed his arm. He saw her eyes were wide, feigning a wonderful madness.

"Here." She slipped from her coat and folded it over his arm.

"Now wait a minute—" He was smiling, although he felt he shouldn't encourage her. She was gone before he could think of a way to discourage her.

She ran into the first circle of light on the left and stood poised for a moment. Her left arm, extended to the side and rounded at the elbow, offset her right leg, which was straight and arched to a point on her other side. Her right arm was rounded, chest high in front of her. Then as if a band holding all of these in tension snapped, she pulled together and spun three times sharply on her left foot. Carson watched as she jumped out of the turns into a string of quick steps to the light across and up the street. She turned again; this time they were inside turns balanced on her right foot. So she went, from lamp to lamp, zigzagging down the street.

Carson could see her clearly now, scattering the bright leaves with her movements under the street lamps. She was a vibrant whole, moving with discipline and beauty. There was then a move which reminded him of something. Reminded him of another ballet and the blue man. He had a sudden frenzied thought in which the blue man appeared and sent Diana spinning with a snap of his wrist. Spinning into a purple mist, trailing lengths of pink cloth, she disappeared into a small red fire

which the blue man kicked apart in his wild, strong leaping. Carson called to her and she stopped. As he ran, he realized he could not tell her

about the blue man. He would have to say something else. Something closer to the truth about the ballet, his writing, and them.

Schools

● Charles B. Tinkham

In the breeze
Light as a spirit's passing
Old curtains stir.
The house is still.
The moon
With the whiteness of mushroom
Grows in at the window.

In stuffed surprise an owl
Stares at the ruin
Of the fisherman's shack.

Outside, up through the duneside
Of poplars,
Climbs the nightsound of surf,
Moving edge of the depths
Where once, in undying schools,
The whitefish and sturgeon and trout
Ran swift-bodied and clean
Through water bright as stone.
Now the fish are gone.
Now the fisherman.
Tomorrow, this ghost of a house:
The tractors will come,
And the cranes,
And then,
Where the dune now stands
Like a last giant wave—
The long dark ore boats.

The Sign Painter

• J. F. Hopkins

People who can dismiss their past mistakes as things they can do nothing about are fortunate. My wife is like that. But I must have a bit of the masochist in me; I can't let go of the stupid things I've done. "You can't do anything about it now," my wife will say. I concede that she is right and go on regretting what I said or did or didn't say or do on some past occasion.

The oldest of these regrets goes back almost thirty years. My wife never knew my Uncle Jim, my mother's brother, whom I never called anything but Jim. He was dead before Ann entered my life. It will usually be on a Saturday night, over a few bottles of beer, that I will talk about him at length and sooner or later remark that I wish she had known him. And she will say that she feels as though she did.

I have only one snapshot to show her, and I can't reproduce the sound of his voice but I can still hear it. I can hear him laugh and I have an exact image of how he looked when he laughed. It is frustrating, not being able to convey these things, but infinitely more frustrating not to be able to undo the past.

James Woodall was a sign painter. I suppose there wasn't a trade in the land that held anybody in good stead during the Great Depression. But I'm sure it was better even then to have been a plumber or an electrician than a sign painter. Yet I remember his having a good bit of work to do. My

mother used to quote her father's brother, an artist by profession—he never earned his living any other way—to the effect that James did the finest lettering he had ever seen. It was a skill that evidently didn't go totally overlooked in the Thirties. Whatever it was that made a mockery of Jim's talents, it wasn't the economic conditions of the time. My aunt thought it was drink. My mother thought it was his lifelong inability to get up in the morning. As for me, I never did settle on any one theory.

I was the last in the family to give up on Jim, the last to become ashamed of him. It was perhaps a year before his death that I was walking underneath a railroad overpass when I glanced across Bay Street and saw him walking in the opposite direction. He clearly hadn't seen me. In that fatal second, I decided not to call over to him. I continued walking, my eyes straight ahead.

A few years before, as a high school student, I had looked out from the bus in which I was riding and there he was—walking across the Grange Street bridge. In my delight, I raced to the front and got off at the next stop. I ran to meet him and we stood on the bridge, the river far beneath us, and we laughed and talked. It didn't matter that I had intended to ride another ten blocks.

It was as a college student, a freshman, that I wouldn't so much as cross

the street and pass the time of day with him. Somebody I knew might have come along, and I would have had to introduce them, I suppose.

In those last years, no one in our family even knew where he lived. We assumed he had a room somewhere. And he could always come to the third floor apartment my mother and I shared and get a good meal. In the heart of the Depression, we saw him virtually every night. But by the time I was a college sophomore, we usually didn't see him more than once a week.

It would have changed nothing, I am sure, if I had called over to him that day on that dark, damp stretch of Bay Street underneath the railroad tracks. He would still have shown up at our apartment, dying, on a late Saturday afternoon in November of the following year. But that is what I would undo—the moment I decided to keep on going, to pretend that I hadn't seen him.

It doesn't hurt nearly so much to look back on that last weekend of his life. I acquitted myself fairly well. I don't mean that it too isn't a bitter memory. But there could have been no doubt at all about the march of events. There was nothing that one decision rather than another could have redeemed.

When my mother said, "I think it's him," as she stood at the house phone, I knew immediately that she meant Jim. Said one way, *him* meant her brother-in-law, John Rankin, her sister's husband. Said another, it meant Father Charles, a distant cousin, but, as the only priest in the family, in a privileged position. But as she said it on that late Saturday afternoon, it was unquestionably Jim who was downstairs in the vestibule.

"Will you go down and see?" my

mother said. "I think he has a load on."

I doubted that he had. Years of self-neglect had taken their toll, but he had never shown up drunk. However, as I started down the stairs from our third-floor apartment I feared that she might be right. I envisioned a scene in the vestibule, my uncle dead drunk, me demanding to know how he dared show up at our apartment in that condition, and old Mr. Nagle taking in the whole disgraceful episode.

Mr. Nagle, over eighty, a widower and retired carpenter, owned the house and retained the entire first floor for himself. He was the only one I was concerned about. I didn't care what the occupants of either of the second-floor apartments saw or heard. A young married couple had the second-floor rear, a middle-aged woman the front apartment. Neither the couple nor the woman had lived there long; I had no more than a nodding acquaintance with them. But Mr. Nagle I knew quite well. We had been living in his house from the time I had started high school. He was always pleasant with me, but he was the kind of righteous, severe Protestant, Catholics like ourselves were never wholly certain of; we suspected that things we regarded as simple pleasures he regarded as sinful. If somebody had to witness my humiliation, I wouldn't have chosen Mr. Nagle.

Through the door glass, I saw Jim still at the mouthpiece, appearing almost to be clinging to it. Fortunately, he wasn't shouting. Hardness of hearing was old Mr. Nagle's only infirmity.

When I opened the door, I got a terrible shock. I saw that Jim wasn't drunk. He was ill. He was ready to

collapse. I grabbed him. "It's okay, Jim, it's all right." He mumbled something but I couldn't make it out. I should have given the doorbell a jab and alerted my mother before trying to get him past the door, but I didn't think of it. I knew the door hadn't closed all the way—it took a good slam to do that.

I put his left arm over my shoulder and with my right I supported him under the armpit. When we made it to the door, I gave it as good a push with my left hand as I could manage, and I was grateful that it stuck when it completed the arc. It wouldn't swing back and catch us.

The old, familiar brown felt hat fell off when we reached the stairs. Sick though he was, close to passing out, Jim wanted that hat. I could tell from the way he was hanging back.

"Forget about it, Jim. It'll still be there when I come back for it."

He mumbled a dissent.

"Jim, nobody's going to take your hat. Come on. We've got to get you upstairs."

He ceased hanging back. I wanted that hat almost as badly as he did. I didn't want old man Nagle coming out and finding it. That hat was the only one I could ever remember Jim having. I never clowning around with it, as I did with the hats of other men in the family. It was a hat I handled gingerly when I had to handle it at all. Perhaps an expert could have determined its age from the layers of dried sweat. I gave it a backward glance. Snow was melting on its crown.

I wondered how far he had come through that snow. His overcoat, as familiar to me as his hat and, again like the hat, the only one I could recall ever seeing him in, was damp

around the shoulders. I figured it was not simply the melting snow. He was perspiring profusely and was undoubtedly running a high fever.

I was a strong kid that second year in college. No athlete, but strong. I needed to be, if I was to get Jim up those two flights of stairs. I was determined to get him up there if it killed me. At no time did I doubt, despite the strain, that we would make it. My principal fear was that old man Nagle, hearing an unaccustomed noise, would come out in the hall to investigate.

We were halfway up the first flight when I heard a noise—the sound of my mother's slipped feet. From the top of the landing she looked down at us and certainly there was a question on her face; she was asking it without saying anything.

"He's sick," I said.

Then she disappointed me. She held up a hand to hush me and came down a step so that she was in a better position to lean over the banister and see whether old man Nagle had come out. I was ashamed of her doing that. I was ashamed of myself.

"Can you manage?"

"Fine. You stay up there."

I got Jim to the landing and we rested. The hardest going was ahead. The ascent was steeper and the stairs narrower. I wondered whether there would be even room for us on the same step. I also wondered if it was wise to rest, if it was even resting. Jim might be wearing himself out simply standing there, holding on to the railing, with me supporting him around the waist. He had in no way acknowledged the presence of my mother. As a matter of fact, in a way she hadn't acknowledged his, having said nothing to him directly.

"Is there anything I can do?" my mother asked.

"His hat's down there. You can get it. He's worried about it."

Neither of us, at that point, had thought of getting a doctor.

"Come on, Jim. One more to go."

He mumbled something about hating to put us to the trouble. That made me feel bad, but I was relieved that he was able to hear me, that he was able to say anything at all.

There did prove to be room for us on the same step but there was nothing to spare. I hadn't waited for my mother to catch up and go ahead of us. So she was behind us, restricted to the torturous pace at which Jim and I were proceeding. However, she must have relaxed a bit when she was able to close the door at the bottom of our stairs, the door to our apartment. My struggle to get Jim upstairs would go unobserved by the other tenants and Mr. Nagle.

And it was a struggle. But we made it to the top, and Mother said, "Get him to your day bed."

I wanted to give her a smart answer like "Where the hell else would I take him?" but I never did give her smart answers when Jim was around, and I didn't then.

"Hold on, Jim," I said. There was still another step—the two bedrooms and the bathroom were on a higher level than the living room and the kitchenette. Jim stumbled over it and I thought we were going down, but I stopped his pitch forward.

My bedroom was first, off the hall. Mother helped me get off his overcoat and I eased him down onto the bed. He had held out as long as he could. He went sound asleep. I took off one of his shoes. The smell almost made me ill. His feet had smelled terribly in recent years even

in shoes. With him asleep, I was tempted to tell Mother she was lucky she had no sense of smell. I didn't. I still had a certain amount of loyalty to Jim left. I removed the other shoe.

Mother drew in her breath and made a face, but I knew that was because of the gaping holes in the socks and the dirt that was revealed, not the smell.

"I'll loosen his tie," I said. "There's not much point in trying to get the rest of his clothes off, is there? It would only disturb him." I knew I wasn't being altogether honest.

"Put the light blanket over him. What are we ever going to do?"

"Well, there's no question he needs a doctor. It's not a matter of sleeping something off. You can tell that."

I drew down the shades, wondering where I was going to sleep that night. On the living room floor?

We went into the living room to talk things over. The sun had gone down and when I looked out the window, I saw that the snow was thick against the street lights. A lone pedestrian was plodding through the snow. I didn't know how far he was going but I was sure it wasn't far. In the time I stood at the window, I didn't see a single automobile pass.

"A doctor's going to love coming out in this," I said.

"If one will even come," my mother said.

"One's got to come. He needs attention. And come hell or high water I've got to go to class tomorrow. You know that, don't you?"

"Of course. I wouldn't have you missing classes."

"Anymore than you could stay home from work to look after him."

"Well, I could hardly do that."

"That's what I mean. Besides, he

needs medical care. Neither of us could look after him properly."

I knew we were both thinking of a previous time that he had shown up at our place, gravely ill. That would have been about six years before, when I was 13. That time we waited four or five days before calling a doctor. The Depression was on, and Mother wasn't going to call in a doctor unnecessarily. But when she saw that Jim was growing worse, not better, that his recovery depended on more than simply getting a good rest, she told her sister that it was absolutely necessary that a doctor be called in, and that the least she could do would be to pay the bill since she could well afford it, and it was at our place that Jim was staying and receiving what care we could give him.

My aunt did get a doctor—a real big shot who had an office on The Square. My family wasn't much for running to doctors, but when my aunt wanted one she would get the best, whether for herself or her husband or for Mother and me and, out of a sense of obligation, for Jim. They were still on speaking terms back then, but that was the most you could say for the way it was between them.

The doctor came that time six years ago and said that Jim belonged in a hospital. I remember that the doctor himself took him there, assisting him down to his car. At that time we lived in an apartment building that had an elevator, and the doctor didn't have the struggle that I had six years later. Still, it was a fine thing for him to do.

The diagnosis was pneumonia and when Jim got out of the hospital, he spent a long convalescence at my aunt's, which wasn't far from The

Square, and the doctor looked in on him every so often.

There would be no convalescence at my aunt's this time. The Rankins—my aunt and her husband—had written Jim off for good. I suppose it was understandable that her husband was even more bitter about him than my aunt. Jim wasn't his brother.

My mother was right in thinking it would be difficult to get a doctor. When the third call proved futile, she thought of Father Charles. It was a happy inspiration. Our cousin knew somebody at the Naval Hospital, and as Jim was a veteran of what was coming to be known as the First World War there was no question of his eligibility. An ambulance came and Jim, too sick to speak, was carried out.

My mother wept.

"You ought to be glad they came," I said. "Think what a jam we'd be in if they hadn't."

"Charles is so wonderful!" she said, sobbing.

It was concern for Jim I had expected to hear, not an appreciation of Father Charles. But I said nothing. I was in no position to throw stones. There was virtually nothing left of my childhood devotion to Jim. In short, I had come to share the low opinion of him that my elders had.

That night Mother was on the telephone with one relative after another, starting with her sister. I listened attentively to the succession of calls as I put my room in order, first transferring to the hall closet Jim's hat and overcoat and the coat to his suit.

The telephone was in Mother's bedroom, and hearing her end of the conversation, much the longer end in view of the day's dramatic

happenings, was no problem. We always waited until bedtime before closing the three doors—the door between our rooms and the two that opened on the hall.

The details and the order in which she presented them never varied. I found myself waiting for the part in which I figured so prominently and acquitted myself so well. I had virtually carried Jim up the stairs. It was an exaggerated version but not such a departure from the truth that a correction was warranted. Getting Jim up those stairs had required all my strength. I wouldn't have wanted my role understated.

In the hall closet, I pushed the coats as far to one side as possible, away from our things. We had a locker in the cellar, and if Mother hadn't been on the phone, I might have been more tempted than I was to take his things down and put them in it. But that idea bothered me, and furthermore I didn't want to miss out on any of the phone calls.

What should I do with the light blanket I had drawn over him? It seemed silly to send it to the dry cleaner's. Jim certainly wasn't suffering from a contagious disease. It was either a return of the pneumonia which had laid him low six years ago or a general collapse brought about by booze and not eating properly.

As I picked up Jim's shoes, Mother was telling about my practically carrying him upstairs. It was Father Charles's sister on the other end of the line. I was glad neither Father Charles nor his sister could see these shoes. Or smell them.

They were beyond repair. At that moment, standing there, looking down at those terrible shoes, I wondered why we had never thought to buy him a pair. We had given him

two shirts the previous Christmas. For the price of the shirts and a couple of bucks more, we could have made it a pair of shoes, and he needed the shoes far more than the shirts. Wouldn't he have bought shoes if we had given him a gift certificate in the necessary amount? But then I thought of Jim walking into one of the Grange Street stores that sold gift certificates and presenting his, and I knew what an outlandish notion that was. I put the shoes in the closet. At the opposite end from where I had my own.

I was glad that before Mother got off the phone, she called the hospital. His condition, she was told, hadn't changed. That didn't tell us much.

"I'm terribly afraid," my mother said.

I didn't want her to cry. She had got through all those telephone calls without crying, and I didn't want her to break down now.

"Well, he pulled through the last time," I said. "I remember that doctor helping him out of our apartment and I was sure I'd never see him again. About a year later he was laughing about it. 'You never thought you'd see me again, did you?' and he laughed again. I didn't think it was very funny."

"What a loss, you'll never know what talent he had."

"I know," I said, annoyed. But at least she wasn't crying.

"He could have been so many things. A doctor, a lawyer. He had the brains to be anything he wanted to be."

Now I know that brains had nothing to do with it. Or everything to do with it, if brains is a big enough word to accommodate what I mean. But that night I didn't take my mother's idea any farther than she had.

"It's funny he never put that artistic ability of his to better use," I said. "Sign painting is on the way out. He could be in advertising." I was thinking of the ads in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

"Uncle John said he was the finest letterer he ever saw."

It was an opinion I had heard before, would hear quoted more than once in the years ahead. I had seen Jim do lettering but not in some years. One summer he obtained a lot of work, most of it straight painting rather than lettering, at a large apartment building in our neighborhood. I used to go over to see him at every opportunity.

I remember seeing him at work, in a sunlit court, kneeling, brush in hand. I would have denounced anyone who would have had the temerity to suggest that perhaps there was someone else in the world who could have produced that good a sign.

But much more vivid is my recollection of four figures in water color that he did for me on a Sunday afternoon, an eighth-grade art class assignment due the next day.

The art teacher and I had carried on something of a vendetta. Surely there was a mutual antipathy. Once she remarked, in front of the class, that I looked like a nice boy but wasn't one. The remark cut deeper than either of us knew. Whatever its immediate effect, it did nothing to thaw out my stiff fingers or quiet my fears when I clumsily poked about the paint box, with little notion of how to proceed.

I had come to a desperate pass the Sunday afternoon Jim came to my rescue. The thought of ever starting the assignment had me almost ill. He asked me what the matter was. I told him about the teacher, the things she

said to me, her way of looking at me. He gestured for me to get up from the table. He took over.

"Just help me," I said. "Don't do it all. She'll know I didn't do it."

He didn't answer, except to look amused. The old familiar pipe was in his mouth, and there were flecks of gold in the brown eyes. Relieved, I watched him work. Relieved, yet apprehensive. What would the teacher think?

The woman, lousy teacher though she was, was no fool. Not in a long lifetime could I have turned out those modish, svelte figures, grace in every line, the one gown a shade of green that I doubt even the teacher could have coaxed into being.

She never said a word. When she returned our homework, which she had, as usual, graded, my submission was not included. I didn't ask her for it.

From that week on, life was easier for me in that class. The teacher let up on me. There was no longer the pressure to do what I was incapable of doing. I can't say that I went on to find the class a pleasure and God knows my work didn't improve, but there was no longer the weekly agony of sitting there, sweating out the bell. A truce had been agreed upon without my having entered into negotiations. I suppose Jim had dictated terms of a kind and the teacher had elected to accept them.

"All his life he hated to get up in the morning," my mother said. "He used to set my poor father crazy. 'James! Are you up?' Papa would call him from the foot of the stairs, and he'd reach out of bed and take a pair of shoes and drop them to the floor and Papa would be fooled into thinking he was getting up."

Perhaps her father was quite will-

ing to be fooled. How often would that dropping the shoes trick have worked? That did not occur to the college sophomore.

But I was alert to her use of the past tense. *All his life he hated to get up in the morning.* I didn't question that my mother could learn more than I from looking at a sick man's face. She knew that this time Jim wasn't going to leave the hospital alive. It was at that moment that I knew it too.

"If only he'd have had a night job, if he had gone to work at midnight—everything would have been all right."

Did I reject this at the time? Perhaps she too was willing to be fooled. Jim was one for fooling people.

That same night she said, "He was always peculiar. Even as a child—the hottest day in summer he insisted on wearing the coat to his suit. One time he was going on a picnic and my mother said absolutely not, he couldn't wear his coat. He would be the only boy at the picnic wearing a coat. So he left the house without one. It was hanging from the outside doorknob of our front door."

I couldn't very well put a face on him, but I could see a kid removing his coat from the doorknob, leaving for the picnic in triumph.

For a failure, his life had been a series of small triumphs. What couldn't he do well? I had seen him, with a single reverse, back a truck into a space that another man had failed to make in four or five attempts. Jim waved him out of the cab and took over the wheel as he had my paint brush. I have often wondered just what it was he wanted from life. Perhaps it had nothing he wanted.

The next day the Rankins—my mother's brother-in-law and her sister—drove us to the hospital. John Rankin said he would remain in the car and wait for us. My aunt asked me what I wanted to do, saying that in Jim's condition he probably wouldn't be allowed more than two visitors. I took the out she had provided. I said I would wait in the car too.

The visit was brief. Jim was unconscious. My aunt, when she and my mother returned to the car, remarked that there was no point in waiting around. It was my guess that my mother would have preferred to sit awhile, but my aunt was probably right. Furthermore, she knew that her husband would have found a long wait intolerable.

Jim and my aunt never did have their reconciliation. He died the following Friday without ever regaining consciousness. I met my mother at the hospital.

A doctor spoke to us there. To my mother, really, although I was standing at her side. When the relationship was established—that my mother was Jim's sister—I thought the doctor would offer a word, perhaps a perfunctory word, of sympathy. Instead, he became incensed.

"Didn't you know that this man was starving to death? As much as of anything else, your brother died of malnutrition."

* * *

That was indeed a terrible moment. But worse, for me, because I created it, was that split second under the railroad underpass. The sun never penetrates that part of Bay Street. But the Grange Street bridge, on a sunny day, the river far beneath you, is a nice place to be.

The Skeleton

(from *Moby Dick*)

● John N. Miller

Amid a hollow in the green
Coiling of vine, he paces down the long
Bleached keel of backbone, threading between
The high-arched ribs with yarn strung
Carefully behind him, taking
His measure of the great white skeleton.

Empty inside. outside, the vine-tips make
Their hushed encroachment; insects hum
With the throb of heat; the slow sway of leaves
Dapples the ground where the bones bask
In ponderous repose as he reads
Their length, trying to whistle at his task.

Then, from a far remembrance of the sea,
The whale rises before him in a rush
Of angry flukes, in peril livingly
Confronted—the full tonnage of its flesh
Swirling through its own element and bringing
Knowledge within the quick span of its tail.

The whale fades. Now, with his piece of string
He ponders through it—jawbone, giant skull,
Descending vertebrae—and like some patient
Sifter of ruins in the Holy Land
Gathers the life of a past age
From vestiges at hand.

Three Poems

• Joseph Beatty

A Story

I was ten under the sun
My bucket for the sea
All things possible
When I came upon a sleek blue fish
Washed up, in the wrong world.

I threw him to the tide
But he was stiff, without give
Or take, and the gulls cried
Glee above me when the tide took him
To its limit with finality.

What could I do in June
With an empty bucket and bated breath,
The delighted gulls already alighting?
I threw him again and again
But he came back like a dead done thing.

The gulls accepted his demise,
Digging into him, even about the eyes;
He was dead and didn't see or know it,
But I carry him beneath the surface of the years
And dream that now and then he jumps.

Melancholy in February

Today I will knock around underground
In a private deeply reserved place
With Yorick, and your love letters.

To engrave them in my heart. To dare
Remember your words in your love's body
And watch them worm away.

I am burning them in a more than slightly mantic
Disposition, helped by Scotch. Yorick
Jests the burning purity of my intention, and your girlish rhetoric.

Time has watered down my passion, dear.
In the fire, your clear insistent words run together
And your blue paper curls like a frail hand fisted.

But an old love is, unreasonably, a grave matter.
I shake my fist in time's face and,
Reluctantly, stir your letters counterclockwise.

Only lovers lie to one another
Overlong. We have woken into truth.
Your letters are purified, black and clean as slate.

Conversion

Time passed like a bird out of a bush
The girl he had tried to win
Has become a nun, a sure-footed penguin

Soulfully serious, biting her lip.
Stepping after salvation in washerwoman's brogues
For kicking Satan in the groin, her robes

To shelter the third-graders from his black blood.
She is more anxious than a sandpiper for their hearts;
Her pitch pipe keeps them busy, well-directed, on their guards.

But once, her mother in the kitchen making
Ham and cabbage, he pulled her pony tail
And kissed her on the lips until she vowed to wail,

But nibbled at his lips more, sucked his breath,
And coaxed his tongue out like a coo coo bird
While she spoke with her nimble fingers words

He had never heard or been touched by before.
She taught the power of tongues; he knew
The fearful joy of conquered and of conqueror too.

Taking him out of himself, she disclosed mystery
In the living room: the gift of the other,
Wholeheartedness: the profane scare of the holy wafer.

Now in her daily skirmishes with Satan
She forgets her not so innocent diversion
That stirred his taste for the all or nothing:
A sweet oracular conversion.

Barnegat in Snow

• R. F. Kaczorowski

The lighthouse knows a farther horizon
than I at its base.

Together, we pierce the heaping depth

of white with our twin dimension:

Erect amid the drifts, we defile the
flakes sliding down our back.

Horizontally, we sight beyond the white silence
to a greater still. The cold,
likewise, waters our eye.

Justice

• Ruth Stewart Schenley

Precise—

The buzzard's spiral

Interprets the law

While his wise sorcerer's face

Scans the East.

Secure—

Our nasty niceties

Amuse the vulture.

He knows he is the answer—

He will feast.

To a Dead Poet

• Per-Otto Erichsen

What is it that you seek in feathered winged things
just above the ocean where it flexes the sunlight
into fragments, facets of design? You had thought, perhaps,
of a clipped flutter in the evening over flames.

Perhaps it is a pattern that you seek, a bond or linkage
in the mind that, once found, brings on wings
and pinions and a beating up close against your window.
You must tell me about it sometime.

Silver Flowers

• John Pesta

A covey of sparrows flits by the classroom windows.

As any flicker sharp and sudden past one window to another, then another, Father Senske's eyes are drawn upward to the rich blue sky stretching off above treetops and the black roofs of the city. Sacred Heart is an old school with high ceilings. Tall, many-paned windows fill two walls of the classroom, and through the wrinkled glass the trees and chimneys and television antennas stand crooked and curved.

"They're a very good class this year, Father," Sister Justina whispers—"except for a few, of course." She whispers, but she means her fifty-odd sixth graders to hear what she's saying. As she turns archly toward them, the boys and girls laugh.

Father Senske nods at her, breaking a slight smile. He's a young priest, taller than the little nun whose face seems to peek up at him through folds of black and white linen. He notices a tiny ball of white powder at the corner of her mouth; she licks it away.

"Do you have any questions to ask the class, Father?"

She means Catechism questions. One of Father Senske's duties is to visit the different classes every few weeks and examine them on Catechism. However, he tells her he's running late this afternoon; there's work waiting for him at the rectory. When he tells Sister Justina he won't be able to stay, she frowns disappointed,

a dark shape against the crystalline windows and blue sky. Heat rising from the radiators causes the leafy plants on the windowsills to wiggle.

Heat rising. The classroom is warm, and the students sit restive, tepid. The old wooden desks, built on slats, resemble flower boxes in which the boys and girls are rooted, faces tilted up. The room is decorated for Thanksgiving, a week away. In a corner, on top of an upright piano, Sister's holiday presents are stacked; apples, cans of fruit, a few gifts which are wrapped. The classroom quivers in afternoon light. Blackboards give off a white sheen, and the brown wooden desktops glare yellow. Streaming through at the sides of drawn shades in the back of the room, sunlight vibrates in cones of slow-wheeling dust, brightening the fringes of girls' hair. The room sizzles; a loud radiator hisses and squirts.

If Father Senske could bring himself to do it, he wouldn't mind tossing Catechism questions at the kids and joking about their answers, but he couldn't do that as freely with Sister in the room. No reason why he couldn't. It's just a personal inhibition. Sister's a good old nun, old enough to have taught him in school. He feels closer to the kids.

"We hope you'll come back soon, Father."

"I'll be back to check on them again, Sister. That's a promise."

The boys and girls rise in a body as he moves toward the door.

Sister follows him into the corridor, wide and dark except for the sunlit doorway at the far end. In a low voice, as if she were in the confessional, she asks the priest for his blessing. She kneels before him, head bowed, as he goes through the Latin, making the sign of the cross over her. When she rises, supporting herself by grasping one of the coat hooks on the wall, he notices the fine, clean network of wrinkles etched on her face.

"Thank you, Father. God bless you."

He catches himself unthinkingly repeating the nun's words, like the words of a tune, as he leaves the building: *thank you, Father . . . thank you, Father*—a sort of hum under his breath.

Crossing the street, he leaves his topcoat unbuttoned. The school is opposite Sacred Heart Church, a tall, spiky brownstone with two steeples. Next to the church is the rectory. Up the street, on the same side as the school, stands the convent, then the four-story high school with its modern, glass-fronted exterior. Rows of old houses with porches and gable roofs cover the rest of the block and extend uphill a block away.

Crossing the street, Father Senske breathes deeply the sharp November air. The sky floats smooth and cloudless with only hazy threads of mist in the distance. Pigeons strutting along the ledges of the church dart into the sunny air, feathers flickering blue and white above the telephone wires. At the bottom of the street a traffic light blinks from green to yellow to red, drops of color pure and striking. From somewhere the

acid odor of pitch is borne to him on a light wind.

The neighborhood seems suspended in the stillness and quiet. In the classroom he'd begun to conspire; now the sharp air files at his chest. Spots of cold perspiration against his skin. Walking with his hands in his trouser pockets, his topcoat hanging behind his arms, he jangles his keys and loose change.

On a table in the hall of the rectory there's a letter from his mother. He hangs his coat in the closet, then carries the letter to his office at the front of the rectory.

In the office across the hall from him, Father Butler is working over a pile of papers and sucking the eraser of his pencil. Father Butler handles the parish finances. He's heavy-set and full-faced, with short dark hair, rapidly receding. He doesn't look up as Father Senske passes, opens the door to his own office, and then shuts it behind him.

He's surprised to find his mother's letter so hurried.

Dear Richard,

We're looking forward to seeing you next week. Let us know as soon as you can if you can come for sure. Frank and his family are coming in from Harrisburg, so it should be like a small reunion. I've ordered a huge turkey. I think when your father sees the food bills, he'll want to shoot me. Take care driving down,

Love,
Mother

He'd like to get away for a day or so to make the trip. North Philly's only fifty miles away; so even if he can only have Thanksgiving Day free, he'll still be able to make it down and back without trouble. A

week before he had presented the idea to Monsignor, but he hadn't wanted to give his decision that far in advance. Now the letter from his mother makes him impatient for an answer, and he makes up his mind to ask Monsignor again: at dinner tonight, he decides.

Going on three o'clock already. Soon the kids will come marching out of school. Father Senske sits daydreaming, staring through his office window at the slate roofs of the houses across the street.

He hasn't seen his family since early summer. If he gets off at Thanksgiving, he can leave early that morning and stop for breakfast at a diner along the road. An hour's drive, with a good radio station, good music—the thought is more and more inviting. Then the big dinner his mother is bound to prepare. He'll come back with turkey sandwiches, cake, apples, pumpkin pie—he laughs to think of it. Driving at night is always a pleasure, a pleasant dream. He pictures the long road, bright November stars, the comfortable warmth with the heating whirring inside the car.

With an effort he reminds himself he should get some work done. He has allowed the afternoon to drift by. In the morning after Mass he visited the hospital for a few hours. He hadn't finished the parish correspondence, and the Sunday announcements must still be typed. He finds it difficult to force his attention back to the work. He's tired, feels like loafing. Through the closed windows, the faint sound of an automatic bell reaches him from the school across the street.

As soon as Monsignor leaves the dinner table, Father Senske ap-

proaches him with his request, stopping outside the dining room.

"Monsignor, last week I asked you about getting away for Thanksgiving—"

"I remember, Richard."

"I was wondering what you decided."

Monsignor thinks a moment, looking past him into the dining room, where the dishes are being carried out by the cooking woman. The other priests are still at the table, talking over their coffee.

"Do I have to let you know today?" Monsignor asks. "I planned on doing something about the beginning of next week. You know, you're the only one who's been after me."

"I didn't mean to rush you."

"It's all right, Richard. You'd like to see your family. I'll see what I can work out." Monsignor excuses himself and walks off down the dimly lighted hall. His cough echoes in the corridor.

There's no reason why he can't wait until Monday. But for the past few hours he's been anticipating so strongly. At the table, one of the priests starts laughing at a joke the other has told. Father Senske walks down the hall, then turns upstairs to his room. Although there's still work remaining, he's in no kind of mood to return to his office.

In his room he takes off his collar and shirt, lays them across the back of his armchair, and lies on the bed. He leaves the room dark. In his mind, images, colors rise and fade, melting into one another. His heart thumps heavily from the climb up two flights of stairs. Lying very still, he feels inside the rush of impressions; lying as still as he can, he feels almost the movement of his blood.

An old sensation returns: lying alone in his room in the seminary,

the voices of seminarians on their way to dinner passing his door; their scattered shouts and laughter outside rise to his window. Especially during his first year at the seminary he kept much to himself, sometimes skipping the long, drawn-out dinners to stay in his room. Eventually his superior noticed this and spoke to him about it. The memory of those days surprises him now—it's been so long. He grows uneasy and gets up from the bed, flicking the lightswitch above his head as he rises. His head spins; he stands still a moment to regain equilibrium.

The dark panes of the window give back his reflection: white T-shirt, black trousers, beige-pink face and hands. The end of the bed is also reflected, as well as the sink and mirror behind the door. The room extends, half real, into the darkness outside. He walks to the window and looks down into the street.

Windows glow warmly in the houses across the way. At one house the porchlight casts a cold white glare on the sidewalk. Leafless branches of trees wave in the night wind, and webbed pattern of their shadows falls on the buildings.

Light and shadow. The night is clear. Skeletal television antennas sway against the blue moonlit sky. He turns from the window and picks up a magazine from his dresser, lies on the bed again, propping his pillow against the wall. He tells himself he should go downstairs and do some work instead of drifting aimlessly like this. But he's stifled, tight, bottled up inside himself. He hooks the backs of his shoes against the metal bedstead and tugs his feet out, the shoes falling with two thumps on the floor.

An occasional car passing down

the street makes the only sound that disturbs the silence.

A sewing machine—the rhythmic, fast, continual sound of a sewing machine runs in his mind amid the new flow of images. A night like this, dark and still. Inside their house, his mother is sewing. He must be only six or seven, he's not even sure. Bundled in a blanket on the sofa, trying to keep from falling asleep. Very vividly he apprehends the entire moment; it all comes back to him. It's hard to face it. The memory stirs a deep feeling of sadness, fear. The magazine drops to the floor. He rolls over onto his face.

With one eye that periscopes above the bedspread, he watches the bottoms of the drapes flutter in the stream of hot air rising from the floor. He closes his eyes, but the light on the ceiling sends bursts of color across the horizons of his eyelids. He pushes himself up to turn out the light.

Darkness enlarges the room. Stars hang suspended in the dark blue sky. The blueness of the night framed by the window, vast, soft, beyond the darkness of his narrow room with its whitish ceiling. He feels empty, almost bodiless, as if his eyes and mind have become detached. Along the top of the windowpane, a film of moisture has begun to collect, spreading toward the bright, needlepoint stars.

The room grows warmer. Without getting up, he squirms out of his trousers. He rolls over again, facing the wall. A car stops outside, voices echo across the street, the car door slams. The fear that surprises him tonight—it's really because he's alone, he tells himself. He hasn't felt it for years, such empty longing. He could escape it in a number of ways. He can't bring himself to do his

work, but he could go downstairs to watch television. Or he could pray. Does he want to escape, though? It pushes at him, and he pushes. Childish. He cannot care. Too late already. There he is, pushing, driving, back and forth. In the warm room, only his bare legs feel the slightest bit cold.

Down the hall outside his room a door opens and slams, the noise reverberating in the corridor. Footsteps echo on the tiles, then clap downstairs. In his mind he counts them, and even after he no longer hears them, he goes on counting. Growing conscious of this, he shakes his head sharply and stops.

Silver flowers.

Stars bloom radiantly in the misted window. He's in his underwear and socks, still on the bed, begin-

ing to feel cold again. Cold claws at his legs. But it's not the cold so much, as it is fear that makes him jump from the bed. He's alarmed to see how the room's been cut off, the misted window having shut out the sky. Like diaphanous ghosts, gleaming starshapes glimmer through the mist, radiating in silver circles. He reaches quickly for the switch and turns the light on. A spasm runs through his body. He shivers.

He puts on his robe and sits on the arm of the chair. He's hot now, a fire in his brain. Oddly, for the first time this day, he feels awake, centered. But the dry feeling in his throat contradicts this.

This lousy day. Drifted through; not his own man, asleep, unconscious, nowhere. Till he broke in pieces like a bird that snaps apart as it soars obliviously through the sky.

Poem

● Brother James Vendetti, F.S.C.

The sun has begun
to reach beneath the blind
and with pale then longer fingers finds
Odysseus not asleep, but gone
And Penelope alone bears no sons
but sleeps with golden secrets: Blind
her pale then longer fingers find
Odysseus not asleep, but gone.

The Temple to God

• Richard Johnson

The natural history of the physical structure of the old Baptist Church on Mather Street, prior to the resident ownership by old man Swenson, *is* important. And though there might be a tendency, an arbitrary urgency, to render it in a summary fashion at the expense of a multitude of details (so as not to totally alienate the reader or completely dislodge whatever latent interest he may have in the natural history of physical structures: in this instance churches), because the history of the church building antecedent to its acquisition by Swenson *is* important, it will be here rendered in full.

I

For, you see, the old Baptist Church on Mather Street was unique. It is still to this day, though very much changed from what it was originally designed to be sixty years ago. And it could be argued whether or not it ever was designed. Perhaps a more correct statement would be that it just occurred. At a given point in time it was thus and so, and at another time it was such and such. Categorically the Mather Baptist Church was singly marked, not by its design but by its total lack of it: an architectural miscarriage.

In the beginning it was just an auditorium or meeting hall. The room would hold one hundred people, and when Mather proposed the plan to the building committee—they were

at that time holding services in the front room of the Mather home—they in a loud and single voice said, “How under heaven do you propose to fill such a large edifice?” That actually was not a direct quote. What they said was “Mather, you’re crazier than a loon.” They, of course, meant the former.

However, Mather was not only the chairman of the building committee, but he had also donated the property and most of the capital on and by which the proposed building was to be constructed. This fact alone was not enough to swing the opinion of the committee, of course, but upon some genuine reflection they with one accord conceded that in such a growing community or settlement, which the greater Pritchard’s Cove area was at that time—and still is to this day for that matter—one hundred people were not too many to expect at some near future date. Mather’s proved sage advice.

On a bright and cloudless morning in July of nineteen hundred and two, Mather and the building committee and a handful of enthusiasts, who had been collecting from Sunday to Sunday in the Mather home, gathered on the designated piece of land on the corner of a narrow cow-path and a muddy buggy trail which were to be known later as Mather Street and Fiftieth Avenue respectively. Theobald Mather stood forth, a big black King James Bible under his arm and his foot planted firmly

on a spade plunged into the earth.

"And on this plot I will build the temple to God," he said.

He then turned over the spade full of rich brown earth. The handful of enthusiasts, the building committee, and Mather then left the field and stepped carefully to avoid the numerous and fresh cow-pies.

Swenson, then only a youth, son of an itinerant Plymouth Brethren fruit picker, watched the proceedings from the field nearby. At the departure of the principals he hurried to the fresh turned sod and extracted several ripe night crawler worms for fish bait. And during the subsequent construction period he was never far from the scene.

The building that was created had a steep roof and a wide wooden staircase in front. It looked very much like the little country chapel with the steeple, without the steeple. It was built into a small embankment, thus providing a partial basement and requiring the stairway in front. The partial basement housed the wood furnace which was later converted to an oil burner. The meeting hall itself was narrow with fifteen pews on each side of a center aisle. Mather wanted to have the center aisle because he said it made it so nice for wedding ceremonies. The platform was raised two steps, and there was a solid oak pulpit in the center. On one side was an Aldrich upright piano, and the choir sat on the other side in three rows of wooden folding chairs that never failed to creak when they were sat on.

II

The very first thing that Reverend Rhyme noticed when he arrived at the Mather Baptist Church was the

absence of a baptistry. Until nineteen hundred and ten the church had done without the services of a minister because Mather did not think the congregation could support one. And since Mather was the chiefest of the lay figures in the church, he had always broken God's truth to them from his large King James. And on occasion they had the services of outstanding visiting laymen and evangelists. But Rhyme was contacted and Rhyme was secured.

Reverend Rhyme could find no reason to be without a baptistry, especially a Baptist church. Baptistries were their stock in trade, after all. Rhyme said that in all of the churches he had ever seen or even heard of in the entire Midwest—he came from Minnesota—not one, not one mind you, was without a heated baptistry within their very walls. Mather was quick to reply that Lake Washington, much larger than all the combined baptistries in the entire Midwest, was within pleasant walking distance from the steps of the church. There in the shallow waters and the sandy-bottomed shore of Pritchard's Cove, they would gather on one of the many warm and balmy days of the spring, summer, or autumn and hold an open air baptismal: a testimony to God and the community. They would wait until there were several candidates and a nice enough day, and then they would march from the steps of the church down to the lake after the Sunday morning service. Then the white-robed candidates and the attending minister would trouble the still waters.

"Our blessed Lord and Saviour was himself baptized in the River Jordan," Mather said. "I can't see that we should be so taken up with any man-made baptistries."

Reverend Rhyme said that was all good and well for what it was worth, but he was not about to serve a church that was without a baptistry within its walls, even if the very Pacific Ocean were in its backyard. He said there was a certain holy and sacred and awesome thing about a baptistry within the house of God. He also added that at some future time, when Mather had passed on to his greater reward, they would call the baptistry the Mather Memorial Baptistry. Mather paid little heed to Rhyme's threat to turn down the call to the church or reference to his own future glory, and only considered the possibility of the addition of some holiness, sacredness, and awesomeness to his dear Baptist Church, which bore his same patronymic and whose builder and maker was God, so to speak.

No one missed the periodic meccas to Pritchard's Cove more than did the youth Swenson. He often went to the Mather Church. His father didn't attend, but waited for the Brethren to gather and found a meeting house. Swenson would follow along to the Cove, and then, when the baptismal had ended, he would disrobe, before God and these witnesses, and take a swim. He had often been formally discouraged from attending these meetings.

And there was added on to the back of the structure a lean-to with a sloping-off roof and space enough to house the baptistry and two dressing rooms, in which the choir members also changed their robes and Sunday school classes were held. There was a large wooden cover that fitted over the top of the baptistry tank, and that space was also used for a classroom.

The water in the tank was drawn

from a cold water tap and then heated by an electric coil placed in the bottom for several hours before the evening service. Then the folding doors behind its platform were thrown open, and the solid oak pulpit was moved to the side by the Aldrich piano. The candidates entered from the doors of the rooms on the sides and stepped into the water about waist high for the average adult and higher and lower on others.

Fascinated by the novelty of an indoor baptistry, the first one he had seen, the young Swenson requested a baptism, but he was rejected by the committee for questioning prospective baptism candidates: he had already enjoyed the efficacy of the Pritchard's Cove service.

When the baptismal service was over, the plug was pulled from the bottom of the tank, and the water rushed through the drain at the bottom of the tank and into the pipe which carried it outside the building into the gutter that ran along the gravel road beside the building. The drain of the baptistry had never been connected to the church plumbing. The children of the church members always hurried out of the service to watch the warm water pour out of the pipe in the wall and splash down the gutter with the warm steam rising up in the cool evening air.

The church building remained the same; that is, there were no new additions, until some time after the death of Mather. Then Rhyme directed the construction of a Sunday school addition in the front with the use of some money Mather had deposited in an account for the church. This section, which was later often referred to by the succeeding minister in private conversation as the

front caboose, was two story and crowded the staircase up tight against the building. Up until this time the Sunday school classes had been conducted in curtained-off sections of the auditorium and the baptistry addition.

With the new extension the illusion of the country chapel without the steeple was lost forever, destroyed. The lean-to roof at the back had only mildly effected this illusion, but the front caboose completely obliterated the last remnant. This was Reverend Rhyme's final contribution to Mather Baptist and to the work of the Lord, and soon after he retired into relative obscurity, though sometimes revived by loyal Rhymeites at business meetings over such issues as the removal of the offering box from the vestibule wall.

III

Swenson disappeared. Since he had reached his majority, he was no longer dependent on or responsible to his itinerant Plymouth Brethren fruitpicker father, and he departed the city to seek his fortune elsewhere. The history of the church on the corner of Mather and Fiftieth continued without him.

When Rhyme resigned to lesser glories, those being in the main the role of spiritual father to the antagonism party, Reverend Sandburg was called. There was an interim of two years, in which time three young seminary graduates aired their tonils and radical ideas until the most settled and mature Reverend Sandburg could be selected.

Sandburg, like Rhyme, came from the Midwest, though not Minnesota. And the membership demonstrated a certain childlike faith in anyone from

the Midwest: if he's a Midwesterner, he's bound to be all right.

Sandburg elected not to trifle with the structure, though he liked it little, as can be attested to by the aforementioned designation, front caboose. He did, however, openly object to the offering box in much the same manner as his predecessor, Rhyme, had objected to conducting baptisms in Pritchard's Cove. Perhaps not in the same manner. One Sunday, shortly after Sandburg had taken over the ministry of the Mather Baptist Church, the offering box on the vestibule wall showed up missing. And in the middle of the morning service he called upon three forewarned men to come forward and pass the new offering plates. They were two myrtle wood plates with red felt pads in the hollow. Sandburg dedicated them to Rhyme, at that time still alive but yet inactive enough to deserve a memorial of some sort.

A formal protest was launched in a special preserve-the-offering-box-on-the-vestibule-wall business meeting called to order by the most active Rhymeite of them all, Anna Kingsley. The argument raged for one whole hour and one half of another until Sandburg persuaded them to let it be tried and tested by fire as it were, and then all could discern if the offering box should be reinstated on the vestibule wall. The myrtle wood plates survived the fiery trial, but other than that, Sandburg did not strongly affect the building. He had far greater expectations. He was looking to the future when there would be a great new Mather Baptist Church on the lot one mile north on Fiftieth Avenue purchased with the remaining balance of Theobald Mather's rich endowment.

When they moved to the new build-

ing, the exterior was still covered with black building paper awaiting the necessary funds to provide an elegant brick covering, and on the interior the concrete floor was bare of the plush carpet it was later to receive. Then some of the young people took an active interest in the old Mather building. Jacob Greeley, as the leader of the group, wished to see it converted into a recreation hall for the young people's fellowships. Most of the young people were eager to do whatever was necessary and possible for them to do. They were not very effective on the whole without the guidance of Greeley. He organized an investigate-the-potentials-of-the-old-Mather-building committee, which was in reality nothing more than a second-rate janitor service. The pews had been removed and temporarily installed in the new building. The carpet was untacked, rolled, and hurried off to the Good Will, for it was absolutely worthless. After a dirt filled, cloudy sweeping of the meeting hall and a slopped-up mopping, it was ready for the great test. Would it or would it not satisfactorily function as a basketball floor or folk dancing hall? It would not. The janitorial staff romped and stomped about the hall for a brief spell and then vacated with vanished hopes, for the half-century-old structure creaked and moaned under their vigorous motions.

"I think the building to be structurally unsound," Jacob Greeley said.

He read his official report to a meeting of the board and finance committee. They banished his hope that the building be torn down and a new recreation unit be constructed at some later and more expedient time by categorically stating the lot and the building were for sale, to-

gether or separately, to the first man that would meet the price.

IV

Several people approached the board and the finance committee about purchasing the old church, but no one was willing to pay the full three thousand dollars. The committee almost gave the building proper to a wreckage firm for the service of the removal of it from their sight forever when old man Swenson, just as if he had been standing in the alcove, came forward and said he had the three thousand dollars at home in a sock under the mattress.

Swenson wasn't so old, over fifty, but he was called old man almost affectionately because of his lack of hair and his Swedish brogue.

"Vell, I tink I go and build me an apartment," he said. "Da vood is good, ya. Dat much I know for sure."

The board and finance committee had been compelled out of Christian charity to explain to him that he must not count on the present structure standing very long. Swenson said he didn't think it had been a very attractive building. It served well as a church, he said, and he an active pentecostal, but he would tear it down and erect the apartment. He moved into the lower level of the newest part, the Mather Memorial Sunday School addition. He began a systematic destruction at the back of the church by tearing out the baptistry and collapsing the lean-to. He removed the wooden steps in front and replaced them with poured concrete into forms that he had formed. He began to convert the oil furnace back to a wood burner. There was very much extra lumber, and some of it too rotten to be of any other serv-

ice. Why, then, should he pay out of his sock for oil?

However, shortly after the inception of his systematic destruction, he was overpowered by tragic circumstances. The end result was that he committed himself to the state institution for the mentally afflicted. One afternoon, it was at this time the hottest part of August, he unknowingly disturbed a hornets' nest in the back which had formerly rested under the eaves of the baptismal annex and now rested on a beam on the ground on which he was then standing. Some of the hornets flew at his face and some up his pants' legs, and he fled to the refuge of his lower Sunday school level, where he was very sick for a couple of days. Later that same week, as he worked on the furnace conversion, he got conked on the head by a low-hanging pipe and wandered around in a daze for the rest of the week. For some time he had been awakened in the night by the creaking and moaning building above him, and then with the dizziness, not to mention the spiders and earwigs in his dwelling place, he came to realize that the Lord Jehovah God was persecuting him for destroying the temple and building thereupon a storehouse for man's advancement, or so he said to the chief examiner at the mental hospital.

When old man Swenson was safely spirited away, the young wreckers of the community, with the well wishes of their unspeakably kind and thoughtful parents who had long abominated the ugly structure on the corner and no less the old man's improvisations, with slingshots and air rifles and stones and ball bats continued the destruction he had began, though not systematically. They broke out all the glass from the win-

dows. They wrote on the white walls with crayons and lipstick. They even broke down the lock to the lower Sunday school level and threw some of his furnishings on the sidewalk in front of the building, including his illustrious mattress. However, he had had the presence of mind to deposit the balance of his old-sock savings in the bank before going to the hospital. And on the subject of presence of mind, it should not be construed that his voluntary entrance into the mental hospital was a reflection on his original decision to purchase the building or vice versa. It would be totally unsound to attempt to establish any sort of cause-and-affect relationship here.

After a relatively brief stay of fifteen months in the hospital, he returned to the safe-and-sane society from which he had fled in terror and was welcomed home by the parade of broken furniture and glass about his shelter in the time of storm. He immediately took up the persecution theme, but this time with vigor and enthusiasm rather than despair and defeat. The chief examiner at the hospital had planted the idea in his mind, and in the fertile climate of his home it grew to fruition. It was not that God was obstructing him on every hand, or that his father now dead, had abandoned him, but it was the devil who continuously sought whatsoever righteous man he might devour. Swenson set about to finish his labors before the winter's cold caused him further delay. To any amiable passerby, he was often found to say that soon on this very spot before God and man would be the most modern apartment in all the city of Seattle. He would admit that it was a thing hard to believe or even imagine, outside of the faithful, with

the present condition of the building in a greater state of destruction than construction, but nonetheless it was a thing very much true.

There were general misgivings when this sole combatant of the powers of darkness undertook the razing of the roof over the main auditorium. But he confidently insisted to even the most fainthearted that half of his training had been in taking down what others before him had put up, and that it was actually just like the small child and the watch, much easier to take apart than to put together. This may have been metaphorical prophecy, for he was exceedingly skillful in razing the roof. He removed the siding. He wrenched out the cross supports and joists. And then rapidly and successively he knocked out, with a wrecking bar, the four corner supports, and the steep roof settled down to the ground, detached from the front caboose, almost gracefully.

Now the clay was ready to be molded in the potter's hand. Potter Swenson only molded after the image of the remaining portion of the old Mather building. He extended the straight walls and flat roof back over the lot. The destructiveness of the neighbor children forced him to alter his plans somewhat, and the proposed huge picture windows to the South became bare siding. He proposed skylights to give the necessary daylight from the sun. He had finished putting on the siding slats, had roughed in a temporary roof till he could devise the skylights, and had begun the work on the rooms inside when disaster struck. Some claim it was an act of God.

The screaming sirens pierced the night's calm, and three roaring fire engines pulled up Mather Street to

Fiftieth. Interested, fascinated, anxious neighbors collected in the street in front of the blazing, smoking building.

"I hope it burns to the ground," one neighbor said.

Swenson was seen in his floor-length flannel night shirt on the second floor. He was directing the firemen to the trouble spot.

"The gates of hell cannot prevail against me," he said.

When the fire was extinguished, the firemen found that it had started from faulty conversion work on the furnace. Little was damaged that Swenson was not well capable of repairing.

The fire had quenched some of Swenson's enthusiasm, and he never truly regained it. He began to slip from that very night and often referred to the event as some sort of hell on earth. It was the final judgment of the damned, the last days, the private revelation of Swenson the divine. At first he repaired the burned out area, but he did not continue the inner workings of the most modern apartment house in all Seattle.

For a season he had abiding with him, that is in the unfinished unit above, a woman who had been near and dear to him at the state institution. The renewal of the old acquaintanceship was not sufficient to renew his old vigor and gusto. She forsook him in his hour of direct need. It seems that he had not arranged for any heat vents to go to her unit above him. Perhaps he had hoped to drive her down to the well-heated refuge of his quarters.

Left alone in the old building, he went fast. His ability to cope with the everyday events of the building and the neighborhood was on the wane. A casual remark from the passing

newsboy was enough to send Swenson to the protection of his apartment. At last he was spirited away by some friendly and concerned interns from the state hospital.

When they came for him, they found him in the back of the rebuilt section of the building, swinging an axe at one of the main corner posts. He was reported to have said:

"Destroy this building and in three days I will build it up."

V

A few years passed. Swenson was not heard of nor from. It was generally accepted by his concerned neighbors that the old man would live out his years, perhaps not too many, in the state hospital for the afflicted. The state itself waited in dignified disquiet, like the expectant father, for his demise, and in the meanwhile had the city police protect its investment.

Then Swenson appeared. For some unexplained reason he had received a weekend pass out of the institution, though he was not well, and he returned to his former home. Finding the place whole for the first time in his recent history, he was almost undone. Yet, this fact reinforced his latest notion, built upon the foundation of childhood Plymouth Brethren and later pentecostal premises, that he ought to do God's work—especially in God's house.

He came in with a paper sack from the dime store, a roll of butcher pa-

per under his arm, and went to his old room and straight to work. On the twenty-five foot roll, two feet high, in nearly illegible script, he lettered his final revelation from God. The letters were high and bold in red poster paint, though cramped together because the message was long. "Cursed be everyman that hangeth on a tree," it said.

Three days later, when Swenson had not returned from his weekend pass, two of the hospital staff came to the juncture of Mather Street and Fiftieth Avenue. They saw the sign and then hurried up the concrete steps to the main door of the unfinished building. The door was open and they entered. There, from a central overhead beam, Swenson was hanging. A part of their job was greatly simplified; without regrets, the two staff members cut him down and called the county coroner's office.

The old Baptist Church on Mather Street will not be there much longer, though, since the property has reverted to the state. The state had to contact a number of people first, including old Phoebe Cary, the former resident of Swenson's apartment, to be sure he had no living relative.

They are planning to establish an experimental chemical sewage control plant on the property, and since it is so close to Pritchard's Cove they can very easily and without the least problem allow the residue to filter out into the sandy bottom.

Auspice

● Padraig O Broin

Leaving their room the morning after
"Here it will always be September"
She said, ran back and creased and tore
The leaf;
Nor heard above indulgent laughter
October's dates, wrong-headed, remember
Two whose new life together bore
But grief.

Dudgeon

● Ralph Luce

Time's carcass, flaccid Bone-Bag,
sucking wind through gut's grating;
God's sieve, dead as the God-Corpse:
if this is Man, let the carrion limp
crutchless, with crooked spine stiff,
his cry stifled by corrupt angels,
his way devious as the Devil's.
Yes, let him creep and complain;
let him corroborate
the carborundum of Christlessness.
But, in his blind bludgeoning,
let him move his warped woof of woe
inch by inch like a worm in wood
until ache lights a lamp in Death-World.

Steering

● Paul Baker Newman

Steering in the gray
impassioned silences of rain
or talking water
to its own self-arguing
as it flows a hill slope
you feel sure
that that is how it feels
when walking miles

of ocean in a sloop
maintaining just about that speed
a leaf might
in the ditch beside you
as you stroll downhill
flowing against
the after-conversation of the rain.

Contributors

MICHAEL KOCH, a junior at La Salle College, is engaged in English studies, fiction writing, and dramatics. "Antagone" his first published story, had its inception in one of his writing classes. CHARLES B. TINKHAM has had four previous poems in this magazine, which are included in his book, *Leaping Out Unfolded*, published in 1964. J. F. HOPKINS, whose "The Sign Painter" is his third story in four quarters, is a consultant in fiction at the Free Library of Philadelphia at Logan Circle. JOHN N. MILLER is a poet living in Granville, Ohio. JOSEPH BEATTY, a promising young teacher and writer, had a story, "Brother," and several poems published here previous to this issue. R. F. KACZOROWSKI is a young writer who is presently working on a long story; the poem in this issue is his first published writing. BETH STEWART SCHENLEY is a poet who teaches at Weyersburg College, in Pennsylvania. PEBLOTTO ERICHSEN, a 1966 graduate of La Salle College, is preparing at Dartmouth College for the Peace Corps overseas. JOHN PESTA, sometime newspaperman, reporter, fiction writer, is pursuing the doctorate in English literature at the University of Virginia. BROTHER JAMES VENDETTI, F.S.C. teaches in Walsh High School, Cumberland, Maryland. RICHARD JOHNSON, whose "The Temple to God" is his first published narrative, is a member of the English staff at Central Washington State College, Ellensburg. He has "two novels with a literary agent in New York." PADRAIG O'BROIN, editor of *Canadian Poetry* and author of *Then Any Star*, had two poems in the May 1965 issue of four quarters. RALPH LUCE is a poet who lives in Rossmont, Pennsylvania. PAUL BAKER NEWMAN has been published in *Antioch Review*, *Carleton Miscellany*, and *Prairie Schooner*, among others. He lives in Charlotte, North Carolina.

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